

**Subject: Appeal to stop Roma people being evicted from  
their own land at Woodside Park****Date:** Mon, 7 Oct 2002 23:43:40 +0100**From:** "[loraine Bayley](mailto:loraine.Bayley@contactbox.co.uk)" <[chrisloraine@contactbox.co.uk](mailto:chrisloraine@contactbox.co.uk)>**To:** "[loraine Bayley](mailto:loraine.Bayley@contactbox.co.uk)" <[chrisloraine@contactbox.co.uk](mailto:chrisloraine@contactbox.co.uk)>

Woodside caravan park is a 17-acre touring caravan park which 27 families clubbed together to buy in 1997. It lies in Hatch, near Sandy, on the A1 in Bedfordshire. The local authority requested some minor modifications in the arrangements to reflect the fact that the people were living there permanently on the site, but then refused all the applications they made to meet those requirements. The European Court of Human Rights has noted this high refusal rate of planning applications from Roma by British local authorities (ten times the normal refusal rate) - this is a deliberate strategy to force Roma into a state of 'illegality'.

Which now means, under Article 178 of the Town & County Planning Act, the council can forcibly evict them at their own discretion, without authorization from the courts. Eviction is carried out by private contractors with no competitive tender, so fees are normally exorbitant. Mid Beds has set aside £230,000, which probably exceeds by far the funding required to bring the caravan site up to planning standards. Under Article 178 the land and possessions of those evicted can be confiscated to pay for their eviction, and in the case of the Roma, usually are.

The European Committee on Romani Emancipation asked the European Human Rights Tribunal to provide an opinion and recommendation in this case. The EHRT emailed a recommendation to all of the Councillors at Mid Beds suggesting restraint and advocating an attempt at reaching an amicable solution with the residents in the caravan park. Unfortunately, the Council ignored these reasonable recommendations and followed the push by their unelected officials to go ahead with eviction.

Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that the land is worth £5 million as a housing estate (someone has already prepared a planning application).

Journalist Jake Bowers states: 'The Woodside caravan park is unlike any of the 325 council Gypsy sites in this country. It isn't surrounded by barbed wire fences designed to keep the inhabitants in. It hasn't even been built near a sewage works or any other industrial facility. It looks, in fact, more like a modern hamlet than a ghetto, except that the homes are on wheels rather than stone foundations. At the centre of the community is a large green where children play in safety.'

Mid Beds Council plan to tow the caravans to a roadside on 1 November, rendering 52 families homeless and ending school for the children, after three years. 150 supporters, including 4 clergymen, plan to join 200 residents to protest against the eviction on the day.

- Please e-mail Andrew Rayment, the head of Mid Beds Council, to urge him to reconsider his decision to evict the park residents